

## **Young emerging adults' graduateness and career adaptability—Exploring the moderating role of self-esteem.**

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This study investigated the moderating role of self-esteem on young emerging adults' in their school-to-work transition phase of graduateness skills and career adaptability. A non-probability convenience sample ( $n = 332$ ) of undergraduate black (98.5%) and female (62%) young emerging adults (18–29 years) at a Further Education and Training (FET) college in South Africa participated in the study. Participants completed the Culture Free Self-esteem Inventory for Adults (CFSEI 2-AD, Battle, 1992), the Graduateness Skills and Attributes Scale (GSAS, Coetzee, 2010) and the Career Adapt-abilities Scale (CAAS, Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Hierarchical moderated regression analysis indicated significant interaction effects between self-esteem and overall graduateness, lifelong learning and global/moral citizenship skills and attributes in moderating overall career adaptability. The relationship between the participants' graduateness skills and attributes (overall graduateness, global/moral citizenship, and lifelong learning) and their career adaptability was significantly stronger when their self-esteem was high than when their self-esteem was low. The finding suggests personal self-esteem to influence self-perceived graduateness skills and career adaptability in emerging adults.

**Keywords:** career adaptability, emerging adults, employability, graduateness skills, global/moral citizenship, lifelong learning, scholarship, self-esteem, vocational skills

### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century career market requires graduates to be armed with an array of transferable skills and attributes (graduateness) which can be engaged from one job to another, used within any profession and at any stage of the graduate's career (Coetzee, 2014a, 2014b; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). Graduateness refers to the quality of personal growth and intellectual development of the graduates produced by a higher

education institution, and the relevance of the skills and attributes they bring to the workplace (Coetzee, 2009, 2012; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Steur, Jansen, & Hofman, 2012).

Employers contend that emerging adults who are graduates lack the basic working or functioning knowledge that will ensure that they are employable and immediately productive in the workplace (Bernstein & Osman, 2012; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Emerging adulthood is regarded as a life stage between adolescence and young adulthood that lasts from 18 to approximately 29 years of age, whenever there is a break of several years between the time young people complete secondary school and the time that they enter stable adult roles in love and work (Arnett, 2000, 2011, 2015; Arnett, Žukauskienė & Sugimura, 2014). The emerging adulthood phase is said to cease when individuals are able to (1) accept responsibility for themselves; (2) make independent decisions; (3) become financially independent (Arnett, 2000, 2011, 2015). This study sought to investigate the extent to which personal self-esteem influences young emerging adults' self-perceived gradueness and career adaptability within the South African labour market context.

### **South African careers context**

South Africa seems to have a severe crisis with regard to youth unemployment. Young adults or graduates are not developing the necessary skills or experience required to enter the world of work (De la Harpe, Radloff, & Wyber, 2000; National Treasury, 2011; Van Aardt, 2012). Within the context of these transitions, the relational aspects of the psychological contract between employees and employers expect employees to obtain and foster a set of personal skills and competencies or strengths such as lifelong learning (gradueness), tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (adaptability), autonomy, self-awareness and self-efficacy (self-esteem) (Ballout, 2009).

The school-to-work transition (18 to 25 years) is one of the most critical phases in a graduate's career, as it influences future career success and professional outcomes (Koen, Klehe & Van Vianen, 2012). The youth unemployment challenge in South Africa is strongly linked with the inability of young adults to obtain employment owing to their lack of experience, which very often is compounded by a lack of industry-relevant skills (Van Aardt, 2012). The gap in industry-ready skills makes many psychological demands on the young adult, including their self-perceptions of workplace readiness. Other contributing factors to youth unemployment are historical, including the relative economic deprivation from a South African economy which is struggling to meet the aspirations of those marginalised by

decades of apartheid and, more recently, a declining economy consequent upon the global economic recession of 2008. All of these highlight the magnitude of the need to prepare youth to create their own employment (Quintini & Martin, 2014; Van Aardt, 2012; Van Vuuren & Fourie, 2000).

### **Graduateness skills and attributes**

Graduateness skills and attributes constitute a graduate employee's graduateness in three holistic, overarching attitudinal domains of personal and intellectual development: (1) Scholarship, (2) Global and moral citizenship; and (3) Lifelong learning (Barrie, 2004; Coetzee, 2012; Steur et al., 2012). Coetzee (2012) identified eight core skills and attributes that constitute the graduateness of young adults and which are clustered under these three holistic, overarching attitudinal domains of personal and intellectual development: scholarship, global and moral citizenship and lifelong learning. Table 1 below illustrates these eight core skills under the clusters of scholarship, global/moral citizenship and lifelong learning.


Table 1

*Graduateness attributes clustered in three attitudinal domains of personal and intellectual development*

<b>Scholarship</b>	<b>Global/Moral Citizenship</b>	<b>Lifelong learning</b>
Problem-solving and decision-making skills	Ethical and responsible behaviour	Goal-directed behaviour
Analytical thinking skills	Presenting and applying information skills	Continuous learning orientation
Enterprising skills	Interactive skills	

### **Career adaptability**

Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that indicates an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated occupational development tasks, vocational transitions as well as personal traumas (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Ferreira, 2012; Maree, 2012; Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Adaptability shapes self-extension into the social environment as individuals connect with society and adjust their own professional



behaviour proportionately to the developmental tasks imposed by a community and the transitions they are faced with in their vocational roles (Savickas, 2005).

Four main resources (known as the 4Cs) characterise adaptability, and they represent the problem-solving and coping approaches used by individuals to integrate the self-concept into their work role (Nota, Ginevra, Santilli, & Soresi, 2014). These four tasks or resources entail to 1) become *concerned* with one's future role as a worker, 2) enhance personal *control* over the professional activities one performs, 3) show *curiosity* before making educational and vocational choices, and 4) develop the required *confidence* to make and implement career choices (Savickas, 2002, 2005, 2011a, 2011b; Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroek, & van Vianen, 2009; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These dimensions of career adaptability signify general adaptive resources and strategies needed at different career transitions, even those beginning in adolescence, as well as in general daily life (Savickas, 2005).

Young emerging adults (individuals in the 18–29 years age group) as early career workers must have career adaptability. In other words, they need skills to adapt to changing career contexts and deal with recurrent transitions (Hager & Holland, 2006; Maree, 2012; O'Donoghue & Maguire, 2005). Young adults should learn to adapt to change, to accommodate it and to enjoy it as well (Blewitt, 2010). Labour markets around the world are in turmoil and it has therefore become clear that assessing and developing career adaptability is now an essential challenge for career scholars and counsellors (Maree, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability improves employability both within and independent from an organisation (Savickas, 2011a). Employers are recognising that young emerging adults' gradueness or employability capacities, as well as their ability to adapt to new work demands, are important human capital resources for sustaining a competitive business advantage (Kyllonen, 2013; Sung, Ng, Loke, & Ramos, 2013).

### **Self-esteem**

Van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, and Dries (2012) found that career adaptability is positively related to self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as a socially constructed emotion signifying feelings and perceptions about an individual's numerous self-concepts and self-images which are based on their psychological need for acceptance and belonging within one's group, the desire for effective and authentic functioning, competence and achievement in comparison to

other members of one's group (Battle, 1992; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Coetzee, 2005; Hewitt, 2002; Maslow, 1970; Potgieter, 2012b).

Research has shown that self-esteem significantly influences employability attributes, adaptability significantly contributes to employability, and the self-esteem of individuals higher on employability is less likely to suffer during unemployment compared to those who are low on employability, which can be attributed to the fact that employable individuals take a more positive approach to unemployment, seeing it as an opportunity rather than a threat (McArdle et al., 2007; Potgieter, 2012a, b). Furthermore, self-esteem serves as a substantial predictor of an individual's career adaptability (Cai, Guan, Li, Shi, Guo, Liu, Li, Han, Jiang, Fang, & Hua, 2015; Öncel, 2014; Tolentino et al., 2014).

Career adaptability, identity and social support predict employability, and employability in turn then predicts self-esteem, job search behaviour during unemployment, and quality of re-employment at six-month follow-ups (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). Porfeli and Savickas (2012) found that career adaptability was strongly associated with career identity, more specifically with vocational exploration and identification with career commitments, which emphasises that identity and career adaptability are crucial in career construction (Savickas, 2011a) and that people with higher levels of career adaptability make career choices that implement one's identity.

### **Goals of the study**

The study explored the interaction effect between individuals' gradueness skills and attributes (overall gradueness, scholarship, global/moral citizenship and life-long learning) and self-esteem in moderating their career adaptability. The study aim was to assess the moderating role of self-esteem in the gradueness-career adaptability relation. The specific question of interest was: What effect does an individuals' self-esteem have on the relationship between their gradueness skills and attributes and their career adaptability?

Findings would provide insight into how personal self-esteem influences self-perceived gradueness skills and attributes (overall gradueness, global/moral citizenship, lifelong learning and scholarship) in relation to career adaptability. The results would have implications for pre-employment vocational strategies to enhance qualities of gradueness and career adaptability among emerging adults for competitive employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

A non-probability convenience sample of  $n = 332$  undergraduate young adult learners in the school-to-transition phase (females = 62%, blacks = 98.5%) at two South African further education and training (FET) college participated in this study. In terms of age, the sample was represented by participants between 17 and 30 years of age (emerging adulthood stage). The sample further represented 95% unemployed individuals.

### ***Measuring instruments***

Participants completed the Culture Free Self-esteem Inventory for Adults (CFSEI 2-AD, Battle, 1992), the Graduateness Skills and Attributes Scale (GSAS, Coetzee, 2010) and the Career Adapt-abilities Scale (CAAS, Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). They also provided data on their demographics.

The **CFSEI 2-AD** (Battle, 1992) is a self-report inventory measuring general self-esteem, social self-esteem, personal self-esteem and lie-items. In this study, only the overall self-esteem construct was of relevance. The CFSEI 2-AD consists of 40 items (e.g. 'I am happy most of the time, Most people I know like me, I am as nice looking as most people, I have taken something that does not belong to me'). The CFSEI 2-AD uses a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). Battle (1992) found evidence of the validity scores of the CFSEI 2-AD for moderating adults' self-esteem. Content validity was built into the instrument by developing a construct definition of self-esteem and by writing items intended to cover all areas of construct. Battle (1992) found acceptable internal consistency for the factor analysis conducted on the CFSEI 2-AD and found the data to be significant (0.81 for all subjects). For this study, acceptable internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.82 were obtained for the overall CFSEI 2-AD scale.

The **GSAS** (Coetzee, 2010) measures students' confidence in their ability to demonstrate the skills and attributes associated with their graduateness. It is measured on a six-point Likert scale (1 = Never; 6 = Always) and consists of 64 items in total: Scholarship (21 items: e.g. 'I make quick but clear decisions that spur others on towards action'), global/moral citizenship (26 items: e.g. 'I can communicate my viewpoints with clarity and fluency in English'), lifelong learning (17 items: e.g. 'I follow up on goals, tasks and assignments to assure successful completion'). An exploratory factor analysis (Coetzee, 2010) and correlational analyses provided evidence that the GSAS items meet the psychometric criteria of construct, convergent and discriminant validity, and the content is

also appropriate for the theoretical constructs being considered. Acceptable internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranging between 0.91 (global/moral citizenship) and 0.86 (scholarship and lifelong learning) were obtained for this study and the overall scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95.

The CAAS (Savickas, 2010) is a 24-item measure of career adaptability and assesses four facets of an individual's career adaptability, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence as psychosocial resources for managing occupational transitions, developmental tasks and work traumas (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In this study, only the overall career adaptability construct was of relevance. The CAAS is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not strong; 5 = strongest) (e.g. 'Thinking about what my future will be like, Making decisions by myself, Looking for opportunities to grow as a person, Overcoming obstacles'). Confirmatory factor analysis of scores from the CAAS by Maree (2012) confirmed the instrument's construct-structural validity and internal consistency reliability in the South African context. For this study, acceptable internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.91 were obtained for the overall CAAS scale.

### *Research procedure*

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as well as from the participating FET colleges. A consent letter was attached at the beginning of the questionnaire through which participant consent was obtained. Questionnaires were handed out to students at the beginning of a lesson and collected at the end of the class. A total of 355 questionnaires were handed out and the survey yielded 332 useable questionnaires (response rate = 93.5%). Each participant's questionnaire included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire as well as obtaining informed consent to use their responses for the sole purpose of research.

### *Statistical analysis*

The data were analysed using JMP software (version 11, SAS Institute Inc., Cary). Hierarchical moderated regression analyses were utilised to assess the interaction effect between young emerging adults' graduateness skills and attributes (overall graduateness, global/moral citizenship, lifelong learning and scholarship) and self-esteem in moderating their career adaptability. Four regression models were computed; the models included the overall graduateness construct, and the three GSAS meta-subscales of global/moral

citizenship, lifelong learning and scholarship (independent variables) and overall self-esteem (moderating variable) in relation to overall career adaptability (dependent variable). For the purposes of this study, Cohen's (1992)  $f^2$  effect sizes were calculated for establishing the practical significance of the  $\Delta R^2$  values. In order to counter the probability of a type I error, the significance value was set at the 95% confidence interval level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). The moderator variables were mean-centred before computing the interaction terms. This approach also helped to minimise concerns about multi-collinearity. Gender was used as a control variable (male = 0; female = 1).

A series of simple slope tests for each of the regression models which indicated significant interaction effects were conducted in order to examine the nature of the significant interactions between the graduateness variables and self-esteem in relation to career adaptability. Rescaled mean-centred values as outlined by Aiken and West (1991) were used. The zero values for the self-esteem variable in each regression model were set at one standard deviation above and below the mean for participants with high and low scores respectively.

## **Results**

Table 2 shows that the participants scored highest on the GSAS lifelong learning (Mean = 4.65; SD = 0.69) and lowest on scholarship (Mean = 4.18; SD = 0.72). High scores were obtained for the overall CFSEI 2-AD (Mean = 4.18; SD = 0.61) and for the overall CAAS (Mean = 4.16; SD = 0.52).



Table 2

*Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of the CFSEI 2-AD, GSAS and CAAS instruments*

Variables	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	Scholarship	Global/ moral citizenship	Lifelong learning	Overall GSAS	Overall CFSEI 2-AD	Overall CAAS
Gender				0.02	-0.03	-0.02	0.09	-0.01	-0.02
Scholarship	4.18	0.72	0.86	-					
Global/moral citizenship	4.59	0.66	0.91	0.79 ***	-				
Lifelong learning	4.65	0.69	0.86	0.77 ***	0.78 ***	-			
Overall GSAS	4.43	0.65	0.95	0.94 ***	0.92 ***	0.89 ***	-		
Overall CFSEI 2-AD	4.18	0.61	0.82	0.36 ***	0.38 ***	0.35 ***	0.40 ***	-	
Overall CAAS	4.16	0.52	0.91	0.59 ***	0.60 ***	0.57 ***	0.62 ***	0.21 ***	-

### **Correlations**

Table 2 shows the correlations between CFSEI 2-AD, GSAS and CAAS variables, which ranged from  $r = 0.21$  (small practical effect) and  $r = 0.62$  (large practical effect size) at  $p \leq 0.001$ . These values indicated significant positive associations between the self-esteem, gradueness and career adaptability variables. Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) note that the higher the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship and the greater the predictive accuracy of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The highest correlations were observed between the overall GSAS and the overall CAAS ( $r = 0.62$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and the global and moral citizenship and the overall CAAS ( $r = 0.60$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ).

***Interaction effect between self-esteem and overall gradueness skills in moderating career adaptability***

Results of the four moderated regression analysis indicated that all four models were significant and, in terms of main effects, indicated the four GSAS variables as positive moderators of overall career adaptability. Gender and self-esteem did not have a significant main effect on overall career adaptability in each of the four models. Significant interaction (moderating) effects were only observed for the overall gradueness, global/moral citizenship and lifelong learning variables but not for the scholarship variable.

As shown in Table 3, in model 1 (overall gradueness and self-esteem in relation to overall career adaptability), the overall gradueness by self-esteem product term was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.11$ ;  $t = 2.55$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ). The  $R^2$  change was significant ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$ ;  $f^2 = 0.41$ ;  $F = 54.44$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ; large practical effect). Figure 1 plots this relationship and shows that the relationship between overall gradueness and overall career adaptability was stronger when self-esteem was high. At the higher end, high self-esteem participants (HSE) displayed significantly higher self-perceived gradueness skills and attributes as their overall career adaptability increased. HSE participants who scored high on overall gradueness also indicated significantly higher career adaptability scores than the low self-esteem (LSE) participants. Interestingly, when scores were low on career adaptability and low on gradueness skills and attributes, the HSE participants displayed a slightly lower career adaptability score than the LSE participants.

Table 3

*Overall gradueness and career adaptability as moderated by self-esteem*

	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	$R^2$	$\Delta F$	$\Delta R^2$	$f^2$
Gender	-	0.05	-0.003	-0.72					
	0.003								
Gradueness	0.52	0.04	0.65	13.78***					
Self-esteem	-0.05	0.04	-0.06	-1.23					
Gradueness x self-esteem	0.14	0.05	0.11	2.55**	54.44***	0.40	6.53**	0.01	0.41

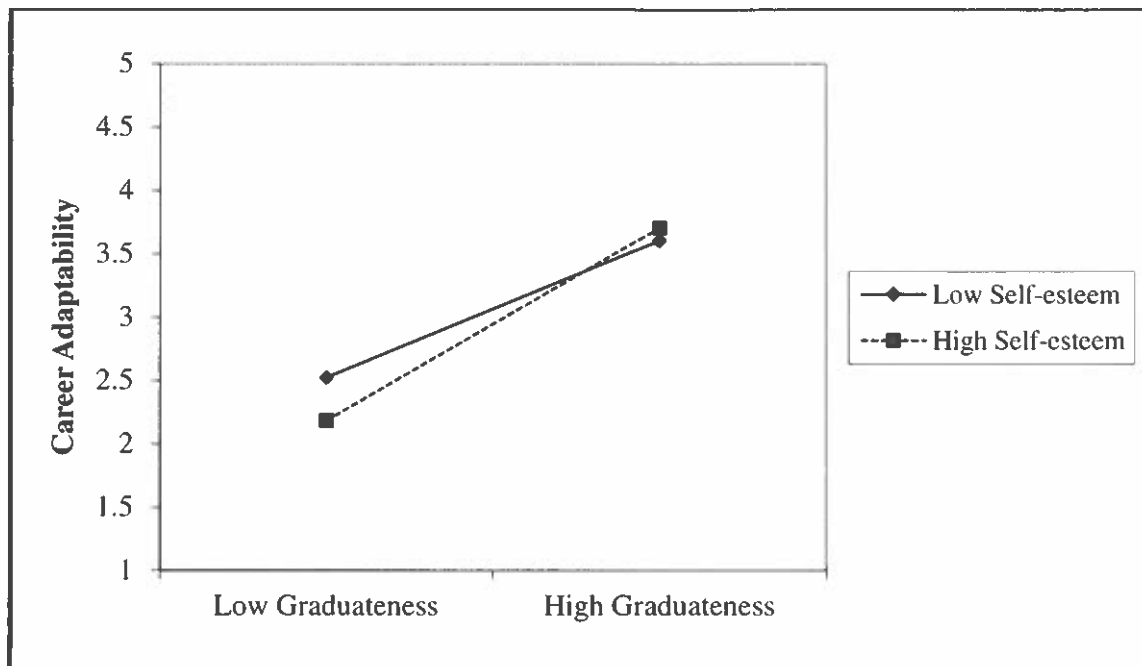


Figure 1. Moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between overall graduateness and career adaptability

*Interaction effect between self-esteem and global/moral citizenship in moderating career adaptability*

A similar pattern was observed in terms of the interaction (moderating) effects of self-esteem for the global/moral citizenship (Table 4 and Figure 2) variable. At the higher end, high self-esteem participants (HSE) displayed significantly higher self-perceived global/moral citizenship skills and attributes as their overall career adaptability increased. HSE participants who scored high on global/moral citizenship skills also indicated significantly higher career adaptability scores than the low self-esteem (LSE) participants. Interestingly, when scores were low on career adaptability and low on global/moral citizenship skills, the HSE participants displayed a slightly lower career adaptability score than the LSE participants.

Table 4

*Global citizenship and career adaptability as moderated by self-esteem*

	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta F$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
Gender	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.15					
Global Citizenship	0.45	0.04	0.59	11.93***					
Self-esteem	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	-0.63					
Global Citizenship x self-esteem	0.14	0.05	0.13	2.86**	41.38***	0.34	8.17*	0.02	0.34

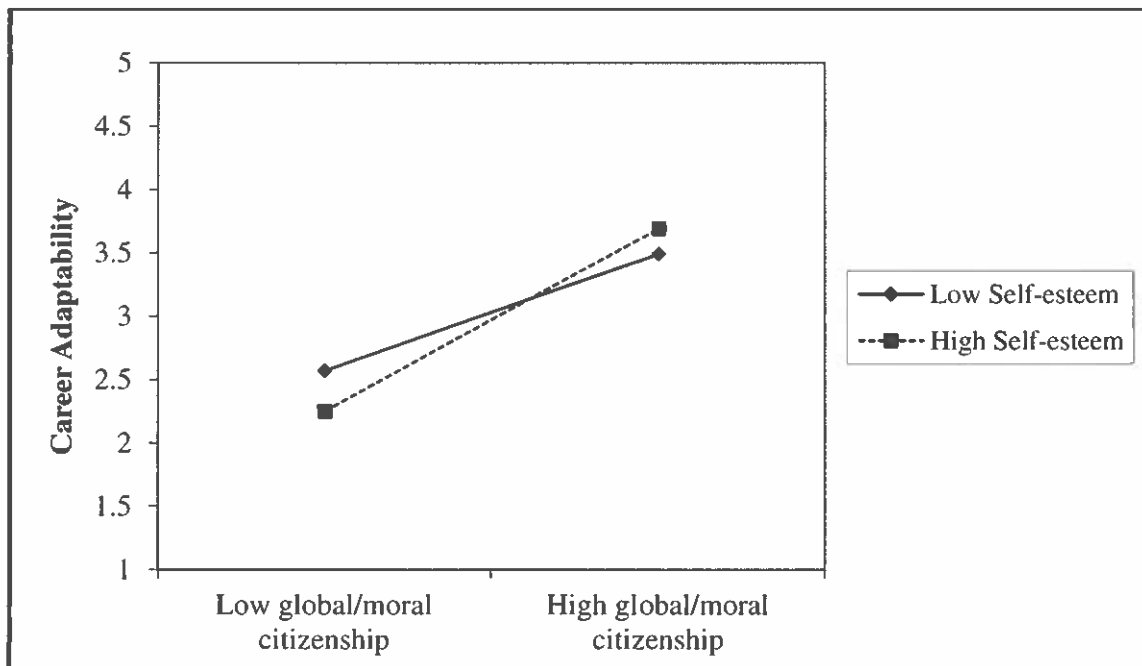


Figure 2. Moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between global/moral citizenship and career adaptability

*Interaction effect between self-esteem and lifelong learning in predicting career adaptability*

Once again a similar pattern was observed in terms of the interaction (moderating) effects of self-esteem for the global/moral citizenship (Table 5 and Figure 3) variable. At the higher end, high self-esteem participants (HSE) displayed significantly higher self-perceived lifelong learning skills and attributes as their overall career adaptability increased. HSE

participants who scored high on lifelong learning skills also indicated significantly higher career adaptability scores than the low self-esteem (LSE) participants. Interestingly, when scores were low on career adaptability and low on lifelong learning skills, the HSE participants displayed a slightly lower career adaptability score than the LSE participants.

Table 5

*Lifelong learning and career adaptability as moderated by self-esteem*

	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta F$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
Gender	0.001	0.05	0.001	0.03					
Lifelong learning	0.43	0.04	0.59	12.36***					
Self-esteem	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.13					
Lifelong learning x self-esteem	0.21	0.05	0.18	4.02***	45.79***	0.36	16.14***	0.03	0.37

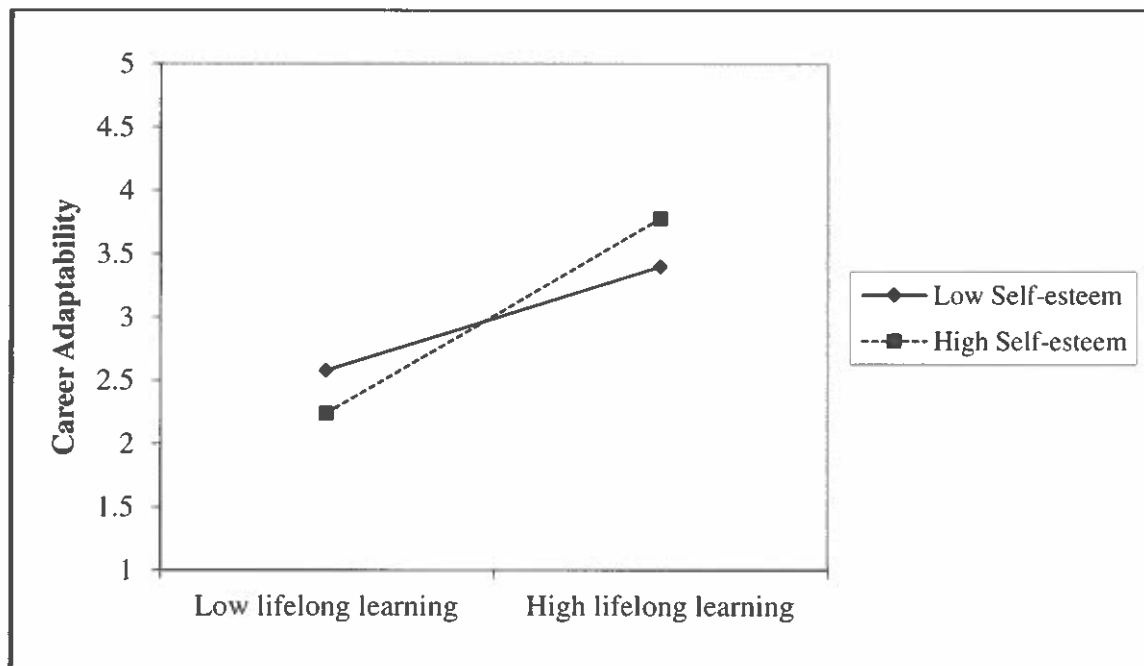


Figure 3. Moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between lifelong learning and career adaptability

No significant interaction effect of self-esteem was found between scholarship skills and attributes and career adaptability.

Table 6

*Scholarship skills and career adaptability as moderated by self-esteem*

	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta F$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
Gender	-0.03	0.05	-0.02	-0.54					
Scholarship	0.41	0.03	0.58	11.93***					
Self-esteem	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	-0.15					
Scholarship x self-esteem	0.06	0.05	0.06	1.21	54.92***	0.34	1.46	0.003	0.34

## Discussion

This study explored the interaction effect between young emerging adults' graduateness skills and attributes (overall graduateness, global/moral citizenship, lifelong learning and scholarship) and self-esteem in moderating their career adaptability. More specifically, it was expected that the relationship between the participants' graduateness skills and attributes (overall graduateness, global/moral citizenship, lifelong learning and scholarship) and their career adaptability would be stronger when their self-esteem was high than when their self-esteem was low.

### *Self-esteem, graduateness skills and career adaptability*

A positive relationship was found between the self-esteem and graduateness skills of young adults in the school-to-work transition phase. Although self-esteem did not have a direct effect on career adaptability, it did have an interaction effect with overall graduateness, global/moral citizenship and lifelong learning in moderating career adaptability. This is supported by the research of McArdle et al. (2007) when they found that adaptability significantly contributes to employability, and they also found that the self-esteem of individuals higher on employability is less likely to suffer during unemployment compared to those who are low on employability, which they attributed to the fact that employable individuals take a more positive approach to unemployment, seeing it as an opportunity rather than a threat, which thus allows them to adapt better to the changes in the environment (McArdle et al., 2007). Zhao, Kong and Wang (2012, 2013) found that people with low self-esteem will refrain from interacting with others due to a lack of confidence in their own

social behaviours and thus also tend to avoid social situations which would expose their social anxiety (Zhao et al., 2012, 2013). Thus people with high self-esteem tend to display higher interactive skills, which also may enhance their career adaptability. In other words, when employability and career adaptability is high, self-esteem is also high.

#### *Career adaptability and gradueness skills*

Results further indicated that when scores were low on career adaptability and low on overall gradueness skills and attributes, global/moral citizenship and lifelong learning, the HSE participants displayed a slightly lower career adaptability score than the LSE participants. This finding is supported by the research of Baumeister, Heatherton, and Tice (1993), Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996), Cairo, Kritis, and Myers (1996), Rusu, Mairean, Hojbotă, Gherasim, and Gavrioloaiei (2015), Savickas, Passen, & Jarjoura (1988) and Twenge and Campbell (2008) wherein they state that individuals with inflated levels of self-esteem tend to be overconfident of their abilities and talents (overall gradueness skills and attributes); they lack empathy, are unable to consider other people's perspectives and react more defensively after criticism by being less friendly thus affecting their interactive skills (global/moral citizenship) and they also tend to set unrealistic goals (lifelong learning).

Scholarship skills did not moderate career adaptability according to the results of the study. It is important to note that scholarship skills include problem-solving skills and decision-making skills, analytical thinking skills, and enterprising skills (Coetzee, 2012, 2014c). The reason for this finding might be due to the fact that the respondents to this study fall into the emerging adulthood phase and are unemployed, undergraduate students. They therefore do not possess the necessary business skills and even the required knowledge of the working world to have well-rounded scholarship skills necessary to predict their career adaptability. This is indeed a skill that needs to be developed in order to ensure that the students in the school-to-work transition phase are more adaptable within their careers.

#### **Implications for career counselling**

Given that a healthy self-esteem moderated work readiness among young adults, career counsellors should target self-esteem support and development (Brockner & Gaure, 1983; Carlock, 1999; Ceccatelli & Battista, 2012; Kernis, 2006; Mruk, 2006, 2013; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everret, 1993). It is an established fact that individuals with a healthy, high level of self-esteem also achieve well academically, adding to their job competitiveness through superiors gradueness skills and attributes. This might be because those with a healthy self-

esteem have a clear sense of who and what they are and display confidence in whatever they choose to invest effort in (Baumeister, 1997). By contrast, individuals with low self-esteem are likely to experience adjustment difficulties across a number of life domains (Coleman, 2011) including accessing the world of work. Zunker (2012) reported on the importance of counselling for self-knowledge (and thus self-esteem), occupational exploration skills and career-planning skills (career adaptability), and improving decision-making skills (graduateness skills and attributes).

However, high self-esteem individuals might also create a difficulties with unrealistic career goals. Individuals with higher levels of apprehension relating to their future careers would exhibit lower levels of career adaptability (Creed et al., 2009). Career counselling with emerging adults should take into account the complexities associated with levels of self-esteem in relation to readiness for the world of work.

### **Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research**

The following limitations relating to this study must be stated. First, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the total population of South African young adults because of the small sample size, the sampling strategy used and the fact that the sample comprised mostly black students. Future research should consider replicating the study for a more representative sample, especially in terms of race, age and gender. Second, the interpretation of the findings is limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data since no interpretations can be made regarding the causality of the reported associations. Future longitudinal studies could clarify the relationships between self-esteem, graduateness and career adaptability variables as reported in this study. Longitudinal studies in various settings could also provide information on the way in which the self-esteem, graduateness and career adaptability of young adults changes over time as they progress from one transition to the next. Third, the potential risk of common-method bias should be considered because of the self-report methodology that was used.

### **Conclusion**

A significant positive relationship exists between a young emerging adult's (in the school-to-work transition phase) self-esteem, graduateness skills and attributes and his or her career adaptability. The relationship between graduateness and career adaptability is predicted by self-esteem, indicating that the more well-developed an individual's self-esteem, the greater his/her ability to enhance his/her career adaptability and cultivate graduateness skills and



attributes. Pro-work readiness and personal attributes would allow the emerging young adult to become and remain employable.

The findings of the present study suggest that those young adults in the school-to-work transition phase who possess a healthy, high level of self-esteem may be better equipped to enhance their career adaptability and cultivate the gradueness skills and attributes necessary to be employed and to remain employable in an organisation. Career counsellors should focus on aiding young adults to enhance their gradueness skills and attributes so that they may improve their confidence, self-efficacy and thus their self-esteem in demonstrating their skills and abilities to manage their careers and employability (Del Corso, 2013).

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